

Andy Burnham's ludicrous demand over the weekend for David Cameron to withdraw party conference invitations to senior US politicians who have criticised the National Health Service smacks of desperation, petty anti-Americanism, and extremely poor judgment. The full letter can be read [here](#). It was also a highly inappropriate intervention by a government minister who should be doing his job serving the public and overseeing 1.4 million employees, rather than abusing his position by engaging in electoral politics.

Burnham's letter to Cameron referred to US Congressmen and Senators who sit on the Advisory Council of the Atlantic Bridge, a well-respected as well as non-partisan organization dedicated to advancing the Anglo-American Special Relationship, and chaired by Shadow Defence Secretary Liam Fox. The Council also includes independent Senator Joe Lieberman, who was the Democratic vice presidential candidate in the 2000 election.

Burnham, whose working knowledge of Capitol Hill is zero, is referring in his letter to some of the most powerful pro-British figures in Congress, including Congressman John Campbell, Senator Jim DeMint and Senator Jon Kyl, board members who have spoken out against NHS-style socialised health care for Americans.

In case Burnham isn't aware, Congressman Campbell happens to be co-Chairman of the Congressional UK Caucus in the House of Representatives. Senator DeMint is the Republican ranking member on the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on European Affairs, and Senator Kyl is the second-ranking member of the Senate Republican leadership. All work closely on issues of direct relevance to the United Kingdom.

Does the Secretary of State for Health seriously believe it is in the national interest to keep these key Congressional friends of Great Britain out of the country because they don't think America should emulate the NHS? Just because most Americans are not in favour of a British style National Health Service doesn't mean they are being rude to Britain.

Americans remain the most pro-British people on the planet despite differences over health care. As last week's Rasmussen poll showed, Britain is second only to neighbouring Canada in the affections of the US public, with 85 per cent describing her as an ally (Canada scored slightly higher at 86 per cent).

At a time when American and British servicemen are fighting bravely side by side in Afghanistan, why is a senior member of the Labour government trying to stir up anti-US sentiment at home as well as bad blood across the Atlantic? If Cameron did accede to Burnham's request (which I think is unlikely) to start banning senior US elected officials from the party conference if they don't back the NHS, it would provoke outrage in the United States and spark a major diplomatic incident.

The United States Congress plays a key role in advancing US-UK defence and trade cooperation, and it would be a huge mistake for the Conservatives or the Labour government to alienate some of the biggest Congressional supporters of the Special Relationship in Washington. The whole Burnham debacle beggars belief, and is a further illustration of how the

deep-seated sneering anti-Americanism of the British Left is never far below the surface.